

THE MAN AT THE WATER PLANT

Most of the young boys who grew up in Marlinton between 1950 and 1990 knew the man at the water plant. They called him "Mr. Curry", not because he required it, but because of their respect and admiration for him. That man was my father, Cecil A. Curry.

I didn't realize just how many young lives my father had influenced until I returned home to Marlinton after an absence of nearly fifty years. No one remembered me but when I explained my father had run the water plant, their faces brightened and a smile appeared. Their usual comment was - "He taught me how to fish" or "He taught my son how to fish." It was obvious how they had appreciated him!

We moved into the drafty log house beside the water plant in 1942 when my father became "operator" and only employee at the water plant. Despite his having only an eighth grade education, he had taken and passed the state examination to qualify for the job. He and my mother would live in the log house until he retired in 1970.

My father loved to fish and he loved to share his knowledge with the many young boys who flocked to the "dam" in the summer to fish in Knapps Creek. Often they would appear at the door to the water plant with a problem and a loud "MR CURRY". It might be a twisted line, a swallowed hook, or some other problem with their fishing gear. He patiently helped them and soon got them on their way back to the fishing hole. Sometimes they came just to show off their catch which he always admired and praised them for their skills.

Mr. Curry seemed to know what young boys needed. Perhaps this came from his childhood when he did not have the companionship of a father. His mother died two weeks after he was born leaving his father with four young boys. His father left him with the Woodell family who later gave him to his "Granny Moore" and never returned for him. Granny Moore was elderly and it was not long until my father was off on his own.

The boys seemed to respect him for the way he treated them. He was small in stature with a gentle voice and a non-threatening image. He could be firm at times, however, such as when a youngster might use bad language. He would not tolerate profanity at the dam and was quick to tell them about it!

After my father retired, he and my mother moved just a few houses away from the water plant. He was able to spend more time fishing, gardening, and tutoring his young students in the fine art of catching fish. He was a familiar sight at the dam helping all those who needed help.

Mr. Curry lived to be 97 years old. He was never a wealthy man but he was rich in friends - which after all is really more important!

SATURDAY NIGHT

When I was a young boy, my world consisted of our small town of Marlinton and the surrounding mountains and streams. Rarely did we travel out of the county and almost never out of the state. Marlinton seemed to have everything I needed or wanted.

The big social event of our week was Saturday night. That was when we all scrubbed clean and went to town. The farm community quit early this one night to travel to town for supplies and to see friends who they may not have seen for a week. Saturday was one night of the week when the merchants remained open past five o'clock.

Those with automobiles began selecting their parking spots on Main Street by about 4:00 P.M. It was almost like church pews with certain spots selected by the same family each week. They would shop, visit with friends, and stay until the stores began to close at 9:00 P.M. Everyone would quietly depart for home to get ready for Sunday church while the town "rolled up the streets".

There were the "sitters" and the "walkers". The sitters chose to remain in their cars while the walkers came by to visit and pass the time before going on to another vehicle. Others chose to stand on the sidewalk and greet the walkers as they went on their way. News and rumors were exchanged and everyone went home better informed than when they came.

There was quite a fuss when the town decided to install parking meters. Some people went out further to park where there were no meters. Others just grumbled and paid the meters. A few were even known to park their cars early in the day to assure a good space and have someone else feed the meter until they returned later in the evening.

Shoppers had their choice of several grocery stores. The A & P (The Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company) was a popular spot and their "Eight O'Clock" coffee was well known. I especially liked their "Spanish bars". They were a long brown cake with raisins and plenty of creamy icing. Fortunately, my father liked them also and would buy one when he had some extra money.

Thomas & Thomas was run by two delightful ladies who also delivered groceries in their "woody" delivery station wagon. I remember they allowed me to fold my newspapers on the top of their coke machine before I hopped on my bicycle to deliver them. There was the Schrader Store, Curry's Super Market, Casdorph's and a few others. Few found it necessary to leave town to buy their groceries.

My mother worked for P. C. Curry, my father's great-uncle. He sold groceries and a variety of other supplies. I always enjoyed visiting with her and watching her work. There was a giant wheel of cheese which always looked so appealing. She used a large butcher knife to cut chunks from it for a customer. She would weigh it, wrap it, and price it. The wheel would then be recovered with cheese cloth until the next order was received. Large pickles could be purchased from a big barrel. She also cut plugs of

chewing tobacco from large pieces. I believe there were nickel plugs, dime plugs, and so on. My father bought small wood buckets of salt fish. They had to be soaked in water overnight before we could eat them. I remember them as being tasty.

Many of the Saturday night crowd went to the "moving pictures" at the Alpine Theatre. Most of us kids went to the afternoon matinee where we could enjoy a good "western" featuring Gene Autry or Roy Rodgers and "The Sons of the Pioneers". There was always an episode of the weekly serial where the hero was left in a precarious position at the end. My favorite was "Sheena, Queen of the Jungle" but there were many, many more. While some movies featured violence, most were good, clean family entertainment. None required parental guidance!

The price of admission was thirty-five cents, and this was not easy for us to get! For a dime more, you could buy a bag of popcorn and a coke was another nickel. We could nurse the drink and popcorn through nearly the entire movie. Those with a little more money could buy a candy bar, such as a Baby-Ruth or Boston Baked Beans.

The matinee crowd was usually very vocal cheering the hero, hissing the villain, and moaning at any romantic scenes. Sometimes the film would break causing painful cries followed by cheers as it was repaired and our hero returned to the screen. Funny scenes brought loud laughter and sad scenes silence. There was always the horseback chase scenes which circled the same large rocks and seemed to go on forever. We didn't mind as they were exciting and the hero won in the end. The cowboy always got the girl, although the horse was usually in between, and they would ride off into the sunset accompanied by music from some unknown source. The evening show started at 7:00 P.M. and were usually more serious. There were no movies on Sunday and all the stores were also closed.

Moses and Meadows was the busiest spot in town. Some came to buy sandwiches and drinks or brose through the magazines. Others came to play pool or the pinball machines. Many came just to watch or stand and talk. The most popular item in town was the "pool room hotdog". On a steamed bun with their special sauce, pickle relish and fresh onions, it was delicious. I was told by one of those who made the sauce that it was made in the back room and cooked three or four hours. Visitors from out of town just had to have a pool room hotdog with a "green river" soft drink. The price was originally a nickel, went to a dime, and eventually fifteen cents.

The pool tables began to fill up early in the afternoon and stayed busy until closing time. There were those who played a few games and left and the "regulars" who came to play all evening. My father was one of the regulars. His companions were usually Emerson Sharp, Bert Smith, and Ted Bright. They played partners with the two losers paying for the game. Sometimes these games became very serious especially if there was a "fox" where one player intentionally left the cue ball where his opponent would not have a clear shot! After all, games were three for a quarter and on a bad night, a player could spend a dollar or so for a few hours play!

You entered the pool room to a mixture of sights and sounds and smells. You threaded your way through the crowd with their constant din of conversation, past the tempting smells of the sandwich counter, by the bing-bing of the pinball machines and into the smoke filled pool area. It was a great place to spend a relaxing Saturday evening!

The pool room was largely a male domain with few women venturing beyond the soda fountain or magazine rack. Lang's Dress Shop, on the other hand was strictly for women. Few men dared to go in for fear a male friend would see them coming out! I don't believe I was ever in their store.

For an old fashion ice cream soda or milk shake, you would go to the Royal Drug Store or to Harry Sharp's. I loved to watch them fizz the sodas with the foamy top sticking up above the tall soda glass. Chocolate was my favorite. The drug store was usually quiet while Harry's was a bit noisy with mostly kids occupying the booths. The drug store was also where we stood in line to buy our school books every fall.

For men's clothing, you had the choice of the Men's Shop, Wilbur Sharps or the general stores like Brill's and Schraders. Another favorite of mine was Schrader's "5 cents to \$1" store where all the toys could be viewed. I often bought a roll of caps for my cap pistol. We referred to it as the 5 and 10.

The Home Product Market or "froggy's" was the best place to buy fresh meat. They even had a home delivery service consisting of a bicycle with a small wheel and large basket on front. Richardson's was the place to find anything for the home, much as it is today.

There were some shady activities going on in Marlinton on Saturday night. Some gentlemen would appear on the street corners with a heavy black bag with them. Others would approach them and the two would disappear down the alley. When the first gentleman returned, his bag seemed somewhat lighter. I believe us kids knew what was happening but when we asked, we were greeted only with a smile.

It is sad now to walk through the streets of Marlinton past the empty stores and to remember what a busy, happy town it once was – especially on Saturday night!

DEER

By C. A. Curry

When I returned home to Pocahontas County a few years ago, I was delighted to see so many deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) in the fields and mountains around my old home. I believe they are a beautiful, graceful animal and each sighting was exciting.

I remembered hunting with my father during the 1940's when sighting a deer was unusual. Hunting them was a team effort with six or seven hunters required. A team of drivers would attempt to drive the deer from their cover and past a shooter on a deer stand. A stand was usually a low place across the mountain or somewhere that the deer would be expected to pass. The shooters job was to kill the deer.

Woe to the hunter who would miss killing the deer as it passed. He was said to have "buck fever" and the only remedy was to cut off his shirt tail. The next day he would be a driver – minus his shirt tail – with someone else on the stand.,

Kills were proudly displayed across the front fender of your vehicle. They fit nicely on the 1940's vehicles with a groove between the fender and the hood. This wouldn't work with today's styles. I'm sure they would simply slide off the vehicle!

Today's hunting methods have changed and it is no longer necessary for drives. Many deer are shot by single hunters and under various regulations, one hunter can legally kill several deer. Out of season kills are possible with special permits for those destroying crops. Improved roads allow hunters easier access to prime deer hunting areas. Despite these changes deer are still plentiful.

I am not a hunter and I deplored deer hunting season. I didn't even want to see my neighbor's trophy deer which was gutted and strung between two trees. I considered leaving the state during deer season to avoid seeing all the slaughtered deer.

My first winter I bought shelled corn and fed the deer. I enjoyed watching them from my bedroom window gobbling the corn. I sometimes got up at night just to check on the deer. Later that winter I had to leave town for two months. When I came back, I found my lawn practically bare. The deer had eaten my new grass so closely that I could barely grasp a blade of it.. I was annoyed but soon forgave them.

Spring arrived and gardens were planted. I didn't plant one but looked forward to helping my neighbor get rid of her surplus crops. The deer had other plans. In one night they consumed her beans, cabbage, and even the green tomatoes. She was devastated and I was now more than annoyed.

Flowers and shrubs were not exempt from the deer's menu. The townspeople had difficulty in raising gardens. Two deer were even seen on the Presbyterian Church lawn.

Some gardeners have resorted to electric fences to discourage the deer. Sometimes even these don't work. The deer seem to have little fear of humans and most dogs.

What happened to cause such great numbers of white-tailed deer now compared to the fewer number that existed when I was a boy some 50 years ago? There are more hunters now and thousands of deer are killed each year. Their population appears to grow and so do the related problems.

One explanation I have heard is that animal populations are cyclical and it is likely that the deer population will decline. There is no evidence so far that this is happening.

Another theory is that the cutting of the big timber has helped their growth. The tall timber provided little food but cutover areas with new growth does provide food for them. A friend cites the import of "Michigan deer" many years ago as a possible answer. They were said to be bigger and stronger and may have allowed a better winter survival rate. A cousin has another interesting theory. He believes the deer population increased dramatically during World War II when the young men were serving in the armed forces and there were few hunters.

Whatever the reason, they have been one of the few animal species which have not only survived the advance of civilization but have greatly increased in numbers. I thought it might be interesting to find out what the deer harvest had been during this same period of apparent deer population explosion. My source was the *Pocahontas Times* which has been reporting deer kills every year. I started with 1942, the first season after World War II started, and sampled the kill statistics through the year 2000 season.

The earlier statistics were estimates while recent ones are the "official counts". They show "about 200" kills in 1942 and a combined bow/gun season kill of 3,218 in 2000, not including other special seasons or permit kills. Totals for other selected years are as follows:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Kills</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Kills</u>
1942	"around 200"	1988	2,064
1944	"a couple hundred"	1989	2,687
1946	"expected to be 600"	1990	3,154
1970	"about 500 killed"	1997	1,820
1980	1,488	1998	1,745
1985	2,148	1999	2,347
1986	2,239	2000	3,218 (Bow & gun)
1987	1,986		

Cal Price in one of his stories also spoke about the influx of hunters into the county during deer season. On December 5, 1946, he wrote "Place the visitors at 4,000 and the number will not be too great". I wonder what that number is today?

My love for the deer took a steep decline late one July 4th while we were returning from a fireworks celebration. I topped a small rise on U.S. #219 to see a deer in my headlights along the left side of the road. I hit the brakes and began to slow down but it was too late. At just the wrong moment, the deer leaped into the path of our car and the two met. I had experienced what many West Virginia drivers have done – a costly collision with a large animal!

A new hood and grille cost us over \$1,000 and lots of time and paperwork. We believed ourselves fortunate as there were no injuries. A neighbor had a similar experience which resulted in a wrecked vehicle, a broken neck, and lots of missed work.

Two days after our encounter with the deer, I saw two fawns bouncing through our back yard. They were adorable and it was hard to dislike these babies. Now, however, I could imagine them as full grown animals crossing a busy highway. I hope the deer will always be in our mountains but I wish there were fewer of them and that they would stay in our beautiful mountains.

WORLD WAR II: CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

By C. A. Curry

World War II, the war to end all wars, was the greatest single national event to occur during my lifetime. Although I was too young to fully realize its significance, my memory of some of the events during the war years remains quite clear.

My first recollection was of December 7, 1941. Our family had gathered in the warmth of our living room to read and listen to the radio. When the announcement of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor came, my father stopped reading, leaned closer to the radio, and listened very intently. I could tell by his expression that something serious had happened but I was upset because I was missing some of my favorite programs such as "The Shadow".

Soon all young men had to register to be called into military service. My father at age 41 was not likely to be called but I am sure that my mother worried that the war would last until I was draft age. Numbers were assigned each person who registered and a lottery held to decide who would be taken from each community. My mother's brother was among the first taken. He and others gathered at the Post Office and marched several blocks to the court house to be inducted. My uncle did survive the war and returned home to marry and live on my grandfather's farm. My mother worried each day he was gone.

Small flags began appearing in the windows of homes. They were white with a single blue star and fringes on the bottom. We knew this meant a family member was serving in the armed forces. Later, some of these were replaced by a flag with a gold star. This indicated that a "gold star mother" lived there and that her son would not be returning from the war.

The town erected a large billboard on a corner in the business district. The names of all county residents serving in the military were written on the billboard for everyone to see. Stars were added beside the names of those killed in action. There were too many names and far too many stars! After the war, the billboard was taken down and a restaurant now stands in its place. I wonder what happened to it. Perhaps it should have been left standing or moved to another location.

Efforts were made to protect children from the horrors of war. Very little discussion of the war was done with children present. Something which touched everyone, however, was rationing. Ration stamps were issued for gasoline, shoes, and many other items. An "A" stamp for gasoline was issued to those who had to travel such as law officers and physicians. Those who had little need to travel were issued "C" stamps.

Some items did not require ration stamps but were scarce. I particularly remember the shortage of bananas. Word would spread that the "A & P" had received a shipment of bananas and everyone would rush to the store. My father and I stood in line to purchase three pounds of bananas – the maximum for each family. The cost was \$.25.

I didn't read the daily newspaper but I did look at the combat maps which were on the front page. They showed the position of the allied and enemy forces in both the European and Pacific theatres. I didn't fully understand them but they did give me an idea of the movement of our troops.

I remember the "War Bond" drives and knew it was through the sale of these bonds that our government helped pay the cost of the war. Meetings were held to sell bonds to the citizens. I attended one rally held in the court house. I am sure it was not intended for children. One soldier told very emotionally and graphically about the combat death of his comrades. Each bond purchaser received a package of combat rations which our soldiers ate. I really wanted one but neither my father nor I had the \$25 or so that was required to purchase a bond.

The schools participated in the bond drives. We would buy "savings stamps" for as little as \$.10 each. These were pasted into a savings book and exchanged for a bond when the book was filled. Every Friday our teacher would march with us to the post office to make our purchases.

Another school project was the gathering of milkweed "pods" These pods contained long silky fibers with a seed attached. When it ripened, the pod opened and the wind carried the fibers away like tiny parachutes. Wherever they landed, a new milkweed plant would grow the next year. We were told these fibers would be used to insulate flight jackets and I seem to remember they could also be woven into a fine cloth. On a warm fall day, our teacher took us across Knapps Creek and to a field on top of the mountain to pick the pods. I remember it as being fun!

During the war I took a paper route. There were only about 35 customers but they were scattered all over town. I was to deliver papers during my school lunch hour and would need a bicycle to do so. Unfortunately, bicycles were scarce due to the war effort. My father finally managed to buy one at Richardson's. It was called a "Victory Bike". The tires were small and made from synthetic rubber. There were no fenders and the handlebar grips were made of wood. They were fine until they got wet when they split and fell off! It was a good bike and lasted several years.

The war seemed endless but it finally did end. The celebration which followed went on for weeks. I wondered why it lasted so long. The boys used it as an excuse to make a lot of noise.

Today modern technology has eliminated many of those things which we experienced during World War II. Thousands or hundreds of thousands can be killed